



AMERICAN ASSOCIATION FOR ACCESS, EQUITY AND DIVERSITY

**AAAED RECOGNIZES THE 30TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT OF 1990**  
***Celebrating 30 Years of Equal Opportunity for All***

Washington, DC, July 24, 2020 - On July 26, 2020, we celebrate the Americans with Disabilities Act's (ADA) thirtieth anniversary. For members of the American Association for Access, Equity and Diversity (AAAED), formerly the American Association for Affirmative Action (AAAA), this date also reflects the work of AAAED members who were tasked with implementing this landmark legislation and its predecessor, the Rehabilitation Act of 1973.

"AAAA was founded one year after the passage of the Rehabilitation Act. In 1974, Individuals newly responsible for civil rights compliance at colleges and universities formed an organization to promote the mission of equal opportunity for all. A major part of that mission was to promote non-discrimination and affirmative action on behalf of protected groups including persons with disabilities," said President Dr. Richard Anthony Baker. To this day, AAAED members are on the front lines at their institutions: academic, private industry or government, to be champions for accessibility, outreach, reasonable accommodations, recruitment and protection against discrimination experienced by members of the disability community.

The ADA is one of America's most comprehensive pieces of civil rights legislation that prohibits discrimination and guarantees that people with disabilities have the same opportunities as everyone else: to participate in the mainstream of American life -- to enjoy employment opportunities, to purchase goods and services, and to participate in State and local government programs and services. Modeled after the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, or national origin – and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 -- the ADA is an "equal opportunity" law for people with disabilities.

In "The History of the Americans with Disabilities Act," written by Arlene Mayerson for the Disability Rights Education & Defense Fund, Mayerson writes that the history of the ADA long preceded the signing of the Act in 1990:

"The ADA story began a long time ago in cities and towns throughout the United States when people with disabilities began to challenge societal barriers that excluded them from their communities, and when parents of children with disabilities began to fight against the exclusion and segregation of their children. It began with the establishment of local groups to advocate for the rights of people with disabilities. It began with the establishment of the independent living movement which challenged the notion that people with disabilities needed to be institutionalized, and which fought for and provided services for people with disabilities to live in the community."

The disability rights movement is composed of many who, like those in the civil rights movement, made visible the indignities and disadvantages imposed upon individuals with disabilities by a culture that preferred that they be segregated and "out of sight and out of mind." The enactment of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, which banned discrimination on the basis of disability by recipients of federal funds, signaled a momentous shift in legal and legislative policy for disability rights.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Arlene Mayerson, Disability Rights Education and Defense Fund, "The History of the Americans with Disabilities Act," <https://dredf.org/about-us/publications/the-history-of-the-ada/> (accessed June 2, 2020).

The first version of the ADA was introduced in 1988 by Senator Lowell Weicker and Rep. Tony Coelho. The community launched a broad education campaign called the “discrimination diaries.” Justin Dart, Chair of the Congressional Task Force on the Rights and Empowerment of People with Disabilities (pictured in the hat and seated next to President Bush), was the indefatigable leader of the effort, traveling nationwide to document the injustices sustained by individuals with disabilities.

In September 1988 the Senate Subcommittee on Disability Policy and the House Subcommittee on Select Education held a joint hearing. “Witnesses with a wide variety of disabilities, such as blindness, deafness, Down’s Syndrome and HIV infection, as well as parents of disabled children testified about architectural and communication barriers and the pervasiveness of stereotyping and prejudice.” More than 700 people attended. Both presidential candidates Bush and Dukakis endorsed broad protections for persons with disabilities.

A new ADA bill was introduced in the 101st Congress on May 9, 1989. After a herculean effort by coalitions, groups and individuals representing the whole spectrum of disabilities including AIDS, the legislation passed the Senate on September 7, 1989. “For the first time in the history of our country, or the history of the world, businesses must stop and think about access to people with disabilities. If the ADA means anything, it means that people with disabilities will no longer be out of sight and out of mind.”<sup>2</sup> The Americans with Disabilities Act was signed by President George Herbert Walker Bush on July 26, 1990, due to the heroic efforts of the disability community. In 2008, the ADA Amendments Act broadened the coverage of people with disabilities and the definitions of disability including adding “regarded as” discrimination.

AAAED members would be the first to say the work is not done, however. The ADA in 1990 was a tremendous advancement in the effort to promote equity and opportunity for a community that faces the highest levels of unemployment and barriers to equal opportunity in education, employment and public accommodations. “As we celebrate the 30th anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and its later amendments, let us remember that the Act is more than making reasonable physical and/or employment accommodations. It is also a mandate to remedy discrimination and harassment based on an individual's actual or perceived disability,” added President Baker.

AAAED members stand ready to join employers, educators, policy makers and colleagues in the disability community to continue efforts to remove the ceilings and floors that prevent everyone from having an opportunity to share their talents in the workplace and beyond. As Senator Edward M. Kennedy, for whom AAAED created the Edward M. Kennedy Community Service Award because of his legacy as a champion of disability rights, has said: *The work goes on, the cause endures, the hope still lives, and the dream shall never die.*”

At our June 23, 2020 Kickoff Session for the AAAED 46<sup>th</sup> National Conference – Virtual, the association opened its program with a panel on the 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the ADA. In October 2020, the conference will also host a panel on the efforts of the Office of Disability Employment Policy, US Department of Labor (ODEP). The panel is entitled “Inclusive Apprenticeship and Equal Access for All: Celebrating 30 Years of the Americans with Disabilities Act.”

For more information about the AAAED Virtual Conference, go to: [AAAED Conference Agenda](#).  
Email: [virtualconference2020@aaaed.org](mailto:virtualconference2020@aaaed.org)

For more information about AAAED and its work in support of members responsible for compliance with Sections 503 and 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 *as amended* as well as the ADA and other EEO laws, go to: [www.aaaed.org](http://www.aaaed.org); Email: [execdir@aaaed.org](mailto:execdir@aaaed.org). To join AAAED, go to: [Join Us](#).

*Founded in 1974 as the American Association for Affirmative Action (AAAA), AAAED is a national not-for-profit association of professionals working in the areas of equal opportunity, compliance and diversity. The longest-serving representative of individuals in the equal opportunity and diversity professions, AAAED has 46 years of*

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

*leadership providing quality professional training to practitioners and promoting understanding and advocacy of affirmative action and other equal opportunity laws. Nearly one-half of its membership is composed of EEO professionals working for academic institutions.*

1701 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW • Suite 200 • Washington, DC 20006 • Phone: 866-562-2233  
202-349-9855, • Fax: 202-355-1399 • [execdir@aaaed.org](mailto:execdir@aaaed.org) • [www.aaaed.org](http://www.aaaed.org)